65% of the workers respectively are blue collared workers, whereas the Mission in Qatar has reported that approximately 65 to 70% are unskilled and semi skilled workers.

**Welfare schemes for workers in Gulf countries**

2248. PROF. P.J. KURIEN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is contemplating any welfare scheme for the Indians working in Gulf countries;

(b) whether Government has received any representation in this regard;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) the steps Government proposes to take to set up the welfare schemes; and

(e) the details of welfare schemes?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (e) The Government is considering a proposal to establish a welfare fund for the benefit of emigrants. The proposal envisages provision of welfare services to the emigrants at all stages — financial support to meet emigration expenses at the pre-emigration stage, on-site welfare during their stay abroad and need based rehabilitation services after their return to India. The Welfare Fund is likely to be established during the financial year 2008-09. Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojna is already being implemented to provide insurance safeguards to the emigrants against unforeseen exigencies. In addition, the Government has launched at Help-line for emigrants, is implementing a scheme for skill upgradation and pre-departure orientation, is setting up a Council for Promotion of Overeseas Employment and is signing MOUs with the receiving countries for the protection and welfare of emigrants.

**Financial Assistance to Gram Panchayats**

†2249. SHRI RUDRANARAYAN PANY: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) the financial assistance being provided to Gram Panchayats by Central Government under Panchayati Raj scheme;

(b) whether it is a fact that funds being given to district panchayats at some places called district council have been curtailed and those funds are being allocated to schemes being implemented under "National Rural Employment Guarantee Act"; and

(c) if so, the actual rights of district panchayats at present and their financial power?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) The Central Government does not directly send financial assistance to Gram Panchayats: funds meant for Panchayati Raj Institutions are routed through State Governments.

(b) The previous SGRY has been subsumed in NREGA and under NREGA at least fifty percent of the expenditure is mandatorily required to be allocated to the Panchayat at the village level. NREGA also provides for district panchayats to approve the district shelf of projects.